

USNS Comfort Departs for Puerto Rico

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From Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

NORFOLK (NNS) -- The Military Sealift Command hospital ship, USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), departed Naval Station Norfolk today and is now underway and making final preparations to support relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

USNS Comfort can arrive in Puerto Rico as early as Oct. 3, but the final date and arrival location is to be determined.

"The medical capability the ship can deliver can be done underway, it can be done in port, or it can be done at anchor. Between the helicopter capability we have and the boats we have, all of those things together give us the ability to be flexible in our mission," said Capt. Kevin Robinson, commander, forward command element aboard USNS Comfort.

USNS Comfort departed Naval Station Norfolk with over 800 Navy medical personnel and support staff with the medical treatment facility (MTF), and over 70 civil service mariners. The medical personnel will provide a full spectrum of medical care to include general practice, family medicine, nephrology and pediatrics. The civil service mariners operate and navigate the ship, load and off-load mission cargo, assist with repairs to mission equipment and provide essential services to keep the MTF up and running.

When not deployed, USNS Comfort is kept in a reduced operating status but can transition to full operating status in five days.

"48 hours ago there were less than 100 people onboard this ship that included civilian mariners and medical treatment facility personnel. Over the past 36 hours, we have flown medical professionals and their support personnel from all over the country and the number of people onboard right now is over 800," said Robinson.

Comfort's MTF is an embarked crew of medical personnel from the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery responsible for operating and maintaining one of the largest trauma facilities in the United States.

"I can't tell you how proud I am of the MTF crew, many of whom just found out last night that they were deploying today," said Capt. Kevin Buckley, commanding officer, USNS Comfort's MTF.

USNS Comfort's primary mission is to provide an afloat, mobile, acute surgical medical facility to the U.S. military that is flexible, capable and uniquely adaptable to support expeditionary warfare. Comfort's secondary mission is to provide full hospital services to support U.S. disaster relief and humanitarian operations worldwide.

USNS Comfort is the second of two Mercy-class hospital ships. A converted San Clemente-class supertanker, Comfort delivered to the Navy's Military Sealift Command Dec. 1, 1987.

Military Sealift Command operates the ships which sustain our warfighting forces and deliver specialized maritime services in support of national security objectives in peace and war.

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170929-N-ML022-0142 NORFOLK (Sept. 29, 2017) The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) departs Naval Station Norfolk to support hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico. The Department of Defense is supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the lead federal agency, in helping those affected by Hurricane Maria to minimize suffering and is one component of the overall whole-of-government response effort. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brittany Tobin/Released)

September 29, 2017

RELATED VIDEO

Navy Capts. Kevin Robinson, commander of Military Sealift Command Atlantic and Task Force 83, and Kevin Buckley, commanding officer of the military treatment facility aboard the hospital ship USNS Comfort, brief reporters in Norfolk, Va., before the Comfort departs for Puerto Rico to join humanitarian aid efforts, Sept. 29, 2017.

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